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Take one.

Wide-Awake Papers. --- No. 3.

THE NATIONAL GAG-LAW.

Why is it that no one of the proposed compromises affords entire satisfaction? We are certainly open to conviction, and advocates of fair play! But few Republicans, or Anti-Slavery men, wish to take advantage of the South, now that we seem to be the stronger party; we do not mean to prove our desire for freedom for black men by tyrannizing over white men; but we go back to the original meaning of the word, and demand a true compromise, which shall be what the word defines—mutual concessions. This battle has been fought under the Constitution of the United States, and according to its provisions—and the parties who are loudly calling for a settlement pretend to desire it as an enforcement of the Constitution. There is no hope of proposing any feasible plan of adjustment, so long as the disputants disagree as to the meaning of the word. Does compromise necessarily imply mutual concession, or the submission of one party? We believe that to be of value as a compromise, grievances must be mutually redressed; but we do not find the compromise-makers recognizing any Northern side to the subject.

We have wrongs which must be adjusted, or we can never be bound by any Act of Congress; and it is time our Southern neighbors know that we have wrongs, and understand that we mean to have them recognized and redressed or we will not move one step in the matter. The day of wheedling, bribing, and bullying has passed away; hitherto the slave-power has ruled the country by one, or all, of these means, and in lapse of time has succeeded in entirely twisting the meaning of the Constitution, and perverting its intentions.

When these States banded under the present Constitution they had just passed through a triumphant but exhausting war for principles, embodied in a Declaration, the life of which is the clause that all men are born free and equal. When the representatives of these States came together to make the present Constitution, the existence of Slavery was odious to many of them, and its iniquity recognized by all; and a portion of the States were so disinclined to enter into a lasting compact with Slavery, that it was found necessary to ignore its existence in the most decided manner; and the sharpest scrutiny of the Constitution will fail to discover any words or clauses which might not have been introduced into the Constitution of a country where Slavery never had existed, and could never find foothold.

There are clauses which, Slavery existing, might be construed to protect it, but especial care was used that there should be no recognition of it, and no power in the instrument to advance the slave-

interest. Not only is this true of the Constitution *per se*, but more especially evident in the recorded declarations of all the leading men, North and South, who framed it, that Slavery was a great moral and social evil, and a pecuniary loss, and that it might, and would, rapidly die out of the country. With this explanation of the doubtful clauses, and the certainty that no legal interpretation of those clauses could further Slavery, the Constitution was adopted.

But there is one fatal error in the Constitution, recognizing property as a power in the State, by the "three-fifths of all persons" clause, in Art. 1, Sect. 2, Div. 3. If property in one portion of the country can be represented in Congress, the persons who hold that property become a dangerous power; they will be governed by a mutual interest, which will, in all emergencies, unite them, as one man, to advance their own ends. No matter what kind of property it is which is so protected, the tendency is the same. Men must have seen this in 1787, as plainly as to-day, but they were wheedled into assent by the superior cunning of their opponents, who argued that Slavery was odious to them, and would die out as free population advanced; but that the population of the free, or nearly free, was in excess of that of the slave States, and unless the balance was restored in some way, the free could at any time tyrannize over the slave States.

Our friends were conscious of the truth of the argument, and blinded by the condemnation of Slavery, and its predicted decline, believed a compromise of principle could not be dangerous, when so nearly nothing was granted. It seemed to them merely a tub thrown to the whale.

As soon as the government got under way, the mutuality of interest united slave-holders, and being united, they succeeded in acquiring power and place. Once acquired, they hoped to keep it; but to ensure its continuance they must have more slave States. By exciting the avarice of their countrymen with accounts of the wealth sure to accrue from a control of the Mississippi, and which was sleeping in the fertile lands of that valley—by arousing the war spirit—by well-timed appeals to our nationality, and the impropriety of allowing a foreign nation a foothold on our soil—they got their first addition of new slave-territory, and the control of the government which they had, enabled them, by office and money, to bribe enough Northern men to manage Congress.

To the increasing strength and arrogance of an aristocracy holding office, came the profit of cotton-growing, and an economical as well as political value to Slavery. Time had rolled rapidly on; Missouri knocked at our door, as a slave State; our refusal to allow any farther increase of slave-power was met by the old methods of bribes and wheedling, rendered more effective by threats. The young lion, as playful and harmless as a kitten when young, had become an adult, and showed its claws and teeth.

At this time a new enemy to Freedom appeared at the North—men who appealed to us as Christians, and called upon us to exemplify our faith—to forgive the seventy-times seven; they told us that "there was a large minority of worthy men at the South who still believed in the axioms of their fathers, and wished to get rid of Slavery. If we did not hold the Union together, and the South left us, these people would be left at the mercy of their enemies. Besides, the most rabid Slavery-propagandists would, by and by, come to

reason. Show your faith in them." Overpersuaded, we again conceded our principles, and, like Esau, sold our birthright for a mess of pottage.

In 1850 we were once more met by the old methods, and asked to redress a new wrong which was being inflicted on the South. Their property escaped to us, and they thereby lost money. They called upon us to enforce the rendition-clause of the Constitution, Act 4, Sect. 2, Div. 3. Who is to enforce that clause? Congress has no power to do it, for the powers of Congress are strictly defined, and in no section has the matter of slave-catching been handed over to Congress, whilst by Act 9 of the Amendments, all powers not delegated to the government remain with the people, and Congress has no more right to make a law binding Massachusetts, expecting Massachusetts to observe it, if the Constitution does not explicitly give Congress the authority to do so, than Massachusetts has to make a law to bind South Carolina, expecting South Carolina to submit, and complaining if she does not.

The enemy now rages, a full grown power, and tells us,—"Your governors and people will not execute the Constitution, therefore Congress shall." But we resisted and pointed to the fact that Congress has, by the Constitution, no power to pass a fugitive-slave law. In reply, we are told, "If you don't submit, and let Congress interfere, and encroach upon the Constitution in this case, we will break the whole thing to pieces." The knife is at our throats, we are bribed and wheedled; and again the Chadbands amongst us pour their cant into our ears, "Justify them by faith just once more; remember that blessed minority who dislike Slavery and *buy our goods*." Again we concede—not compromise. We get nothing, but on the contrary, lose largely, for every slave State refuses to any free State man the rights guaranteed to him by Art. 4, Sect. 2, Div. 1, "that the citizen of one State is equally so of all." First, they pass laws imprisoning any free black man who visits them for business or otherwise, and unless he can pay his way through courts and jails, they sell him for a slave. Second, they watch every Northern man, and unless he subscribes to Slavery as right and holy, they tar, feather, and hang him, or drive him headlong out of the country, confiscating his property, and ruining his business. Our enemy has grown lusty! he seizes on the banner of the country, and claims that Slavery is national, that the flag sanctifies it, that its home is in every territory, in every dock-yard, and arsenal, in the Capitol itself, and threatens us with destruction if we cannot agree to it. They have added slave State to slave State, and have a force of men who act as one for Slavery—whilst we are disorganized, bribed, demoralized.

They deny us the right to go into our Territories, if we want to establish free institutions there; they tyrannize over Kansas, and load down its people with chains more heavy and grievous than those of Austria; and we are besought, for the love of Christ, to submit. "Remember that if you are smitten on one cheek, you are to turn the other; remember that minority of worthy men who are opposed to Slavery; will you desert them now?" Less than five years pass away, and at last the North is aroused, and by the legitimate and constitutional ballot declare that these things must cease; the Constitution must be enforced; Slavery come to a stand still, and

shrink back to its place. "Horrible and outrageous of you, Northern men! Will you trample on us? will you remove us from the seat we have usurped? will you force the robber to disgorge? will you relax the claims of the innocent captives? will you restore this government to the principles on which it is founded? You have no right to! Might makes right, and possession is nine points of the law. We have grown up to this for sixty years. Why did you not object in our infancy? why wait till the tendrils of Slavery have intertwined with every branch and twig of our governmental tree. Once it was a seed, and a tender little plant, and it could have been destroyed with slight loss; attempt to remove it now, and it will tear the whole fabric asunder. Do you not know that the ivy which first clings to the wall, at last supports it, and that its removal would destroy the masonry? Concede again, or we will certainly destroy you. Don't talk to us of Constitution; it is not a sufficient guarantee of our rights. We must have it amended and made to openly avow and support the system, to legalize it, and set all doubts of its meaning at rest forever."

These demands and plans are no new thing to Southern men, forced upon them by the heat and rush of circumstances. Fifteen years ago, a Secret Convention was held in the South, attended by Brown, of Georgia, Calhoun, Mason, Jeff. Davis, and others of the same stamp, together with some army officers and a few Northern doughfaces and traitors, which laid out the future work for Pro-Slavery men. They were to turn and bend, wheedle and bribe, but to facilitate the progress of any party which they could rule, and through which they could get the control of the government. Then they were to put Southern men, of traitorous hearts, into command of the ships, and the forts, and the troops in the Southern States; they were to send slave-missionaries amongst the Indian tribes, to induce them to become slave-holders; they were to equip Southern by depleting Northern arsenals; they were to control the Treasury and Post Office, and then defy the North.

This may seem a prediction after the fact—a history, but no plan. History has only proved the plan which has been exposed now that it is triumphant; and the conspirators dare to boast of the success so long worked for and deferred.

This is the Southern demand: "Legalize, protect, and extend Slavery by the strong arm of the United States. We complain of your encroachments; the emigration of free men into Kansas interferes with the successful planting of slave-labor there, and therefore free men ought to stay away. Anti-Slavery sentiments, uttered in Congress, may make converts to Freedom amongst ourselves; may get to the ears of our slaves, and incite them to escape, and we have no right to complain; you must stop, or we will abate you by the strong hand. The issue of Anti-Slavery newspapers in the North awakens a hostility to our institutions, which acts upon Congress, and at the ballot-box, and tends to overthrow our power. You must suppress these papers. Preaching the Gospel, as applicable alike to slaves and free men, undermines the stability of the institution, and this is not right, for it makes our property insecure. 'Do unto others as you would others should do unto you.' You would not like to have us take your cattle, and ships, and lands. Selecting men to govern the United States, who are free States men, will be fatal to our posses-

sion of place and power; to the extension, or even continuance, of Slavery. It must not be permitted. If you do elect, we will resist. 'Omnis aut Nullis,' is our battle-cry. Concede! concede!" And our Union-savers fill the air with cries, "Compromise! Compromise!" They do not dare to say concede—they hope to gloss the evil over. Our merchants cry piteously, "Have mercy on our commerce!" Our manufacturers, "Have pity on our mills and operatives!" Our office-seekers, "Don't prevent our getting our share of the spoils!" Our party-men, "Beware lest you break down the party! Just this once more—it will settle it—give up once more the principle, it is an abstraction—don't destroy this country for a shadow!"

More than this—our representatives and senators, in Congress, make plans which they call compromises, which are in reality nothing but concessions, of so feeble and halting a character, that they are a laughing-stock to the enemy. Our representative-men dare to admit that the South has wrongs which we must redress by submission. Does Mr. Adams, or Mr. Crittenden, or Mr. Guthrie, or Mr. Peace-Conference, or Mr. Corwin, insist upon Northern grievances—our citizens tarred, and feathered, and hung—our property confiscated—our debts unpaid—our free soil invaded by slave-catchers—ourselves called upon to turn kidnappers, or risk our lives and property—our mouths shut by force—our mails violated—free speech trampled upon—and finally that infamous Constitutional compromise, which is the source of all this trouble—the three-fifths clause? Mr. Adams mentions these things—the rest ignore them. "We are not wronged—we who have lived under, and submitted to, and enforced the Constitution; who have been plundered of \$120,000,000 to extend the area of Slavery; who have paid the salaries of a myriad of Southern office-holders; we have no wrongs, but have done wrong in ever daring to censure Slavery, or in seeking to check its growth, and to remove it from where it exists!"

Free men of the North, how long will you submit to these outrages? Proclaim your grievances! Demand that the Constitution should be enforced—the Supreme Court reorganized. For while *five Judges represent Slavery and eight millions of men of all colors, only four Judges represent twenty millions of free men*; and if the Northern Judges were not appointed by the slave-holders themselves, as *pliant tools* for their purposes, if *every man was thoroughly Anti-Slavery*, the South would be but a minority. *Is this no grievance*, that the Supreme Court of this land should be in the direct interest of *less than one-third of the free men in it*? Demand that the United States shall enforce its laws at the South—*shall protect every Northern man there*, as England does her subjects! Demand that the mails be sacred, and every man allowed to send and receive what he likes! Demand that the Government no longer lend its sanction to Slavery; that the Flag be free! Make the District of Columbia, and every inch of the United States, free soil! Demand that the Fugitive-Slave Law be unconditionally repealed! Demand a National Convention for amendments to the Constitution, which shall make *all men free and equal*—which shall give our property a representation in Congress as well as Southern property, if any property is to be represented. But if Southern representation rests upon the claim of slaves to be men, let that be understood. . If the Southern negro is to vote, let him be instructed how


to vote; let him have the same rights under the Constitution that we have; else let us indignantly refuse to submit to be governed by slaves.

Will you consent to adopt the National Gag-Law,—this Corwin Compromise, enacted like the Fugitive-Slave Law by Congress, and endorsed by the President? Are you *deceived* by its *brevity* and *apparent fairness*? Will you take that step to-day, which your fathers *could not be persuaded* to take in 1787? Are you so false to your ancestors, so dead to the claims of humanity, that you can be led into this denial of *all future rights* to aid the slave by national means?

Will you *bind yourselves or posterity never again to try to overthrow the monster in his den*? Can you hope to defeat him when he sallies into the States and Territories yet to be acquired, *if you have insured his stronghold against all harm*? You may not even propose to buy the suffering millions, in the words of Jefferson, “your fellow-citizens.” Will you pass national gag-laws, to be followed up by the doughfaces and timeservers of your States and cities, who will enact that you shall not discuss these questions lest the country be agitated, which would be wrong and useless when the nation can do nothing? Will you tie yourselves, hand and foot, for all the future? Beware of the pitfall which is dug for your feet. When you put this question to yourselves, you stand beside those who made the Constitution. If you say yes to it, you can never again complain of their actions; you endorse and render more binding and evil their mistakes; you forget all that they said against the system, of its injury to master and slave, of its speedy decay; and voluntarily entail, so far as you can, on all posterity, the evil which has already grown so stalwart that its body occupies the best of our national domain, whilst its shadow darkens all the rest of the land.

Men of the North, awaken to your rights and duties! Raise your banner in your midst; carry it into the thick of the fight! Inscribe these principles upon it, and then ask for a list of Southern wrongs and grievances. Call for a full exposition of their views, and see if you are ready to compromise—but never *concede*! Every time you have done it, you have betrayed truth for a price—have sold your birthright—have forgotten the claims of suffering humanity—have pronounced your Declaration of Independence *a lie*! You have seen that *Slavery* is the *cause* of all the evils which afflict us. You have seen that the *pecuniary value* of this Union is a *myth*—that its glories are not, and will never come until we are free and equal one with another. You have seen that compromise means concession and betrayal—that every time you have sinned you have sunk deeper into the slough. This is the time for the battle! Now or never stand firm for the RIGHT!

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